

Steens Mountain Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

June 15, 2004

Members Present:

Hoyt Wilson, Grazing Permittee, Princeton, Oregon
Jerry Sutherland, Vice Chair, Environmental Representative – Statewide,
Portland, Oregon
Tom Harris, Chair, Mechanized or Consumptive Recreation, Keno, Oregon
Wanda Johnson, Burns Paiute Tribe, Burns, Oregon
Cynthia Witzel, Recreation Permit Holder, Frenchglen, Oregon
Steve Purchase, State Liaison, Salem, Oregon

Members Absent:

Alice Elshoff, Environmental Representative – Local, Frenchglen, Oregon
Stacy Davies, Grazing Permittee, Frenchglen, Oregon
Jason Miner, Fish and Recreation Fishing, Portland, Oregon
Richard Benner, No Financial Interest, Portland, Oregon
E. Ron Harding, Wild Horse and Burro, Hines, Oregon

Designated Federal Official (DFO):

Karla Bird, Andrews Resource Area Field Manager, Burns District, Bureau of
Land Management (BLM), Hines, Oregon

Designated Federal Official Assistants:

Rhonda Karges, Management Support Specialist, BLM, Hines, Oregon
Liz Appelman, Budget Analyst, BLM, Hines, Oregon

Presenters:

Gary Foulkes, Planner, BLM, Hines, Oregon

Facilitator:

Dale White

Commenting Public:

Susie Hammond, Hammond Ranches, Inc., Frenchglen, Oregon
Paul Bradley

Others Present:

Mark Sherbourne, Natural Resource Specialist, BLM, Hines
Sandy Berain, Associate District Manager, BLM, Hines
Dana Shuford, District Manager, BLM, Hines
Mark Armstrong, Public Affairs Office, BLM, Hines
Gary Foulkes, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, BLM, Hines
Joan Suther, Three Rivers Resource Area, BLM, Hines
Michael Williams, Safety Officer, BLM, Hines
Cam Swisher, Environmental Protection Specialist, BLM, Hines
Dave Toney, Fire, BLM, Hines

Welcome, Introductions, Housekeeping and Agenda

Dale called the meeting to order and self-introductions were made.

Chairman Update:

Tom expressed disappointment that no news had been received on the new appointment (dispersed recreation), but was happy to report Stacy had withdrawn his resignation and would be returning at the next meeting.

DFO Update:

Karla noted copies of Stacy's resignation and the withdrawal of his resignation are included in Council members' packets.

Inquiries have been made to the Washington Office, but the location of the Dispersed Recreation nomination could not be determined.

The nomination period for the upcoming vacancies has been extended to the end of June. Karla is working closely with the various entities to get people nominated as well as widening the scope of advertising.

Karla reiterated that Tom Harris had written a letter concerning the appointments. Tom noted the RACs were having to do the same thing.

Review of Minutes:

Due to the lack of a quorum necessary for any approval, the minutes were not distributed nor reviewed.

RMP:

Gary Foulkes reported the RMP is at the contractors for final formatting and editing and the document should go to print right after the first of July. Gary then explained the timeframes of the Federal Register Notices, the protest period, the types of decisions that can be protested, and the concurrent comment period for the Wilderness and WSRs (Wild and Scenic Rivers) plan.

When asked, Gary noted it was unlikely the October deadline would be met.

Gary updated the Council on the recent Socio/Economic training he attended, explaining it is a pilot that is still in the developmental stages with bugs to be worked out. The people attending the training all felt the economic part was relatively easy to obtain; it was the social aspects of planning that were the more difficult.

Karla mentioned there is an opportunity to apply for a training course for the community and BLM to help better understand how to accomplish getting the socioeconomic aspects of planning. She wondered if SMAC would like BLM to go forward with that.

Gary explained upcoming changes in DOI policies that will increase the emphasis on public involvement in the NEPA process and consensus-based management.

Follow-up Discussion from Field Tour:

Each person who led the different sections of the tour gave a brief overview of what was relayed during the tour and what they heard from those present.

Neals Hill Community Pit: Rhonda reviewed the various aspects of her presentation including the mining plan and possible affects to special status species, archaeological sites, visual resources and weeds. Rhonda noted that reclaiming the site is part of the original plan. A concern was raised about location of water sources, and Rhonda will follow up to verify locations.

Juniper Ranch Land Exchanges: Mark Sherbourne discussed possible scenic easements have been identified on three parcels; however, no analysis has taken place yet as the process is just in the beginning stages.

Dale suggested to SMAC members any concerns brought up yesterday should be expressed today so they can be part of the written record.

Jerry noted during the tour some of the public members talked about an RV park possibly on the east side of the Steens. Jerry said SMAC has always had a nondevelopment theme in the entire CMPA, which is why BLM was looking into these easements. The public that was along for the tour was questioning why SMAC wasn't going along with an RV park. Jerry said he was raising the subject for them. He also noted one of the properties is completely out of the CMPA, therefore, this group did not have jurisdiction over that particular piece of land.

Jerry raised a concern about if someone is paid not to do something on their private land, there could be a long line of people wanting to receive a payment for various things.

Hoyt stated there were two major concentrations of RV use, one at Mann Lake and the other at the hot springs in the desert. Although he doesn't really want to see it happen, he assumes Mann Lake would be upgraded as needs are demonstrated, e.g., structured parking spaces, picnic tables, etc., which would help lessen impacts to resources. He stated because of the constant use, Ed Davis would like to see some type of campground facility at the base of Weston road. He has had so many problems with camping on Pike Creek and the scattered camps all over the hillside, he would prefer BLM do it rather than a private entity. He believes BLM would meet the demand, but not create it where private entities would want to promote it.

Karla said Mann Lake will be covered in the recreation plan SMAC recommended writing for the entire Mountain. Karla will be talking to Ed as well as Dan Jordan about possible Cooperative Management Agreements. Tom felt that just putting more parking areas at Mann Lake, where big coaches could park, was not really what everyone wanted. He thought if there was a host and trees, it would be less obtrusive.

Mark Sherbourne stated that BLM was looking into a proposed exchange with Gary Miller. Many of the inventories have been completed on the selected land. Holly LaChapelle is working on the EA for the proposal.

Mark also covered the stop at Willow Creek where the group discussed the possible road reroute as well as other aspects of the proposal. There was some discussion at the time about powerline or be blazed by landowners cross-country. Jerry explained how he believed the different alternatives in the EA need to cover various things such as: if a new route was to be built just by traveling cross country, the existing route would be closed to use; if in that alternative it is ensured the route is closed (like ripping or some way physically making it impossible to access it), then there is a better argument that net road mileage is equal. He favored the powerline alternative as it is would be done in an already disturbed site.

Tom agreed. Putting a road in utilizing the powerline road is far more acceptable to do with less disturbance. If manufacturing a road by vehicle is attempted, they seek the easiest path. Water then goes along that route causing erosion. Equipment would have to be used to drain it properly otherwise it is a mess.

Cindy believes that either way there has to be a means for Walt and his fellow landowners to do maintenance on the road. Even though a road is not being built, there will be consequences. They have the road now, but it would be less of an impact because the creek wouldn't be running back and forth through it.

Mark said Walt was willing to look at the powerline route. When they went over it, it appeared to be less feasible because of the amount of work. Mark stated the

EA will analyze the impacts of each of the options. Jerry noted it would be good to layout in the EA what will happen with the creek.

Mark spoke of Indian Creek and the Weston Basin Roads where there is a continuing issue with 4-wheeler and motorcycle riders driving into wilderness. SMAC had been previously briefed on the concerns. Mark said BLM continues to put signs up and the public keeps taking them down. He will be working with wilderness staff to see if an appropriate sign can be found that would be much harder to remove or destroy.

Cindy stated she brought up one more alternative yesterday. Something needs to be done in the interim, which is to essentially permit the road. Not change it. Leave it where it is. Perhaps beef up the boundary. Create a situation where there is a local vendor (say in Frenchglen) that can issue permits. Stipulations can be made as to what can or cannot be done, and information is accumulated on who is using the area and for what reasons. It also does not limit or restrict use. If violations occur, then it is known who was there. Also, she noted, it wouldn't be necessary to go through a full blown EA for an interim situation until the transportation plan is completed. She suggested including a gate at a reasonable place.

Jerry spoke of the fact there are wilderness violations occurring and something should be done prior to the completion of the transportation plan. He highly encouraged something be done immediately so his constituents' concerns are addressed. He liked Cindy's idea, adding that the discussion on the tour included the use of a locked gate to make it work.

Mark explained that on the Blair bypass road, the new landowner doesn't want to grant an easement across the property. BLM will be required to establish another route for that portion of Miner's Cabin Road. He explained some of the proposals which need to be taken into consideration such as Stacy's concerns and requirements about hauling water for administering his grazing operation.

Jerry asked that the BLM staff take a look at the Carlson Creek Road gate. It is locked and bolted on the swing side instead of the closure side. He saw tire tracks going up the road, which is closed due to it now being in the wilderness. He also reported vehicle tracks at the top coming over from the Bone Creek Rd spur which is supposed to be closed. He asked that BLM check out that closure as well.

Darren Brumback reviewed the proposed idea of sagebrush restoration including riparian. He stated that from mappings as well as observations much of the understory of sagebrush is inundated with cheatgrass which creates an ongoing threat of much more frequent fire occurrence. It is possible that with recurrent fire the entire system could become a cheatgrass stand. The area is of growing concern, and the projects rely heavily on partnerships with willing landowners.

The ID team has been looking at the area and their first priority was to break the fire cycle. Darren reviewed the types of land involved, the partnerships, implementation requirements, and techniques of seeding.

The Council talked of the need to make the seeding look more natural rather than rows as it often appears and the means available to accomplish this. Cindy noted that grazing is known to help plant communities thrive because of the animals using the plants at various stages. Flexibility of use depends on many factors such as special status species presence, other agency requirements, and agency regulations.

Jerry suggested photographing everything before, during, and after so the benefits and changes can be seen. He suggested on the BLM side they focus on non-WSA areas and experiment there so that when they get to the WSA side, the processes would be well developed.

Darren explained how fire breaks are established taking advantage of existing roads, topography, and vegetative communities and would be reviewed by an ID team.

Jerry noted the in WSAs motorized equipment and mechanical transport is not prohibited, but the minimum tool still needs to be met, however. The real bottom line is non-impairment as to WSAs. Any experimentation on process needs to be done outside the WSA since WSAs are to be treated more carefully.

Signing and Brochure Update:

Carolyn Freeborn reiterated, as discussed as last month's meeting, in order to provide an avenue for enforcement it is necessary the information be available for the public. She said with the help of District staff and past sign committee work, Tara Wilson put together some text for members to review and provide feedback so the next step can be made.

Members discussed the placement of the portal signs and what would be available at those locations, including a basic map so that people could tell where the private property lies.

Also raised was whether or not wheelchairs are considered motorized or mechanized and how or if they can be utilized in WSAs or wilderness. Carolyn will follow up on this to obtain the laws. Jerry quoted the Wilderness regulations.

Follow-up: Carolyn will research whether or not wheelchairs can be utilized in WSAs and wilderness.

Suggestions for the brochure included adding something about the American Indians and their use of the Mountain in the opening paragraphs; a separate

section for ADA; under cultural it should read “inhabited” rather than “visited”; and various small corrections.

Scott Thomas is researching a new panel product which is guaranteed not to fade for ten years and it may be a good thing for the portal sign project. For the brochure Tara explained BLM hopes to print it on newspaper, do it in full color, and keep it free.

Carolyn talked about auxiliary roads and the need for some means of identifying to the visitor they are crossing into wilderness. She showed several sign options. Cindy suggested placing the sign at trailheads indicating a certain distance down the trail the visitor will cross into wilderness. She explained how the visitors come here and comment about how they can go for extended periods and not see signs, which to them is a positive.

Council members discussed their views on the signs and possible uses and types and their wish to keep signing to a minimum. Cindy suggested a solution would be instead of putting up signs, the map/brochure would indicate to follow certain landmarks to a destination. She noted sometimes the more developed an area becomes, the more visitation is facilitated. Sometimes it needs to be left to the Mountain and its self-limiting topography.

Public Comment:

Susie Hammond, Hammond Ranches, Inc., stated this was the first time she heard about the sign proposals or saw the possible sign. She worked on the previous sign committee and would have that information included. She felt this group was missing out on a great deal. She felt that if the brochure is put out as it is, the burden of proof will be placed on the private landowner. She felt every time a sign is placed without the private landowner’s input, that is what is being done, cooperative management cannot happen without people. She stated private lands need to be mentioned in the beginning of the brochure. The public needs to know where they are and obtain permission to be on private land. Susie believes the visitors need to know private land is an integral part of the land on the Steens and is unmarked for the most part. Cattle grazing is part of the Steens except for the cow free wilderness. It puts ranchers in a bad position if the public gets the wrong ideas. She stated it is always offensive to private property owners and cattle owners for the cultural resources to always have historic or prehistoric. There are existing working ranches and grazing is part of the cultural use on the Mountain as well as the economics involved. Susie asked for clarification as to the Moon Hill Road and what was intended. Carolyn explained the only signing being considered is at the wilderness boundary so people know they are crossing into wilderness. Susie was very clear as to her position on Moon Hill Road and the desire NOT to have it be utilized as an entry point.

Paul Bradley, local citizen, addressed the proposed road alignment going up Willow Creek. He suggested they don’t make it a straight shot in order to allow

the vegetation to hide it. He suggested on the other road alignment, where it is along private property, with the road along the fenceline as a fire break and because of a safety issue. On the seeding he suggested several options and methods that might allow seeding without the row affect. Related to the signing, he suggested maybe just a stone pyramid or a certain pattern of maybe a half dozen rocks that when people see it, they know they have crossed into wilderness. He felt it communicated the boundary but would be more aesthetically pleasing.

Science Committee:

Carolyn Freeborn reported on the ongoing process of the Science Committee. She informed the Council that Jeff Rose has been talking with people who would be appropriate for the Science Committee. In talking with them some issues arose such as most of these people are very busy and perhaps unwilling to participate because they don't want to get into monthly/bimonthly meetings. Members felt the Science Committee would probably meet about once a year, although research can be ongoing. Carolyn raised the other main issue which is most of the people wish to be paid for their time and effort. Currently the BLM has no funding for it, but are seeking research monies as well as other means of meeting this need. Members discussed what form the science committee would take; how it could be implemented; the possible ramifications of forming it; and how it fits with FACA. Karla suggested the possibility of BLM hosting a symposium with scientists and researchers invited to share information.

Follow-up: The next time a quorum is present the decision to form a Science Committee will be revisited.

Wild Horse Gather EA:

Carolyn Freeborn updated the Council on the South Steens EA which is nearing completion, and should be out for review within a couple weeks. The gather requires the use of helicopters. It depends on where the horses are, when it comes time, whether or not a trap will be necessary and where that trap may need to be placed. Carolyn explained the helicopter is under a national contract and the reasons for this. Although BLM has approval on the trap site, there are certain things that cannot be changed due to it being a national contract. Many of the details affecting the gather won't be known until the actual time.

Jerry expressed concern about no flexibility in the helicopter contract.

Stonehouse EA Update:

Carolyn reminded the Council of the field trip to Stonehouse two years ago. She explained that because of job changes and the RMP, this EA had not been completed. Joe Glascock is working on completing this. He met with Ed Davis and came up with a rotation similar to the one proposed by Jim Buchanan. Carolyn described the proposed projects that could be implemented.

Jerry reiterated that since his constituents want that entire area as wilderness it doesn't really matter where a fence is placed. Jerry brought up that all the pasture boundary fences are in poor condition. Jerry doesn't believe it can be assumed that other fences are functional. Part of the agreement was that Ed Davis would rebuild the boundary fence. Jerry asked if the fences had been repaired and felt it was important to ensure it was completed.

Follow-up: Karla will ask Joe to make sure the fences have been taken care of.

August Agenda:

The agenda for the August meeting was discussed and various topics proposed. It was decided the August meeting would be cancelled and the various topics proposed would be discussed at the September meeting.

Tom was asked to contact Jason to see what was going on with him. If that failed, Tom was instructed to write him a letter asking the same question.

Submitted by Liz Appelman.

Minutes approved as amended on Tuesday, September 14, 2004.

Tom Harris, Chair

Date